

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
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April 15, 1999

In Reply Refer to:  
9215 (FA230) **P**

EMS Transmission 4/16/99  
Information Bulletin No. OF&A 99-053

To: State Directors

From: Director, Office of Fire and Aviation

Subject: Human Resource Development Committee Conference Call

The BLM Wildland Fire Human Resource Development Committee held its first conference call the morning of March 15, 1999. The purpose of this conference call was to follow up on action items from the first meeting of this committee, held January 28, 1999 in Sacramento.

Committee members participating on the call were Bob Lee (New Mexico), Rick Belger (Idaho), Ed Strong (Alaska), Diane Friez (Montana), Debie Chivers (NIFC) and Larry Sutton (NIFC). Ron Dunton (National Office of Fire and Aviation) also participated. Members not present on the call were Mike Rieser (Colorado), Pat Kidder (California) and Kevin Hull (Nevada).

The Committee's charter has been finalized and signed by Les Rosenkrance. Copies of this document will be sent to all committee members and State Fire Management Officers.

Diane Friez reported on the activities of a subgroup of this committee that was established to deal with some of the many issues related to the GS-401 series and its use in the Bureau's fire program. This "BLM Qualls Group" of Diane's is not to be confused with an interagency group working on GS-401 issues, led by Paul Broyles (NPS), Roy Johnson (BLM) and Jim Knox (NIFC Personnel) among others.

The purpose of Diane's "BLM Qualls Group" is to bridge the gap between the fire community and the personnel/HR community. The group intends to tackle issues plaguing the fire program such as inconsistency in interpretation of qualifications standards from State to State. The group will be meeting on April 19-20 in Denver. Jim Knox, Melissa Dukes (NHRMC) and Ron Dunton plan to attend that meeting also. A key goal of this meeting is to coordinate with Jim Knox regarding the actions being taken by his group, so that duplication of effort can be avoided.

Pat Kidder was not available to talk about the draft time line for the Apprenticeship Program that he had distributed. However, there was discussion about the Apprenticeship Program in general and where the Bureau is headed. The question was asked whether the Apprenticeship Program is a California program or a national program. Everyone on the call felt California was doing a great job, but the general feeling seemed to be that the program needs to evolve and become a truly national program; its scope is already national due to the participation of most of the BLM states.

Ron Dunton emphasized his position that the BLM needs its own Academy, not to take away from what California is doing but to supplement it. California BLM will no doubt continue to participate in the California academies. Ron's vision is of a Great Basin-based Academy, developed and led by the National Office in partnership with the State FMOs. Ron also feels that the Bureau needs to move toward the use of the Apprenticeship Program as the standard intake mechanism for "entry-level WAE" positions. Some sort of grace period would be needed to accommodate people who are currently "in the system" on temporary appointments with five to ten seasons of experience.

To develop a new Apprenticeship Academy, several items were considered by the group. First, it was felt that a two-year planning and development process is a realistic time frame; in other words, the first Academy held at the new location would occur in the spring of 2001. It's obvious that it should be an interagency Academy and that there needs to be a connection with an institute of higher learning for accreditation purposes.

Since the Bureau of Land Management already has an agreement for apprenticeship with the Department of Labor, nothing new would be needed along those lines. However, some work is needed to formalize Alaska's training program for the "entry level WAE" so that it fits the requirements for apprenticeship. It was felt that Alaska's training program is already very similar to the formal Apprenticeship Program in many ways and that it could be adapted fairly easily. Alaska apprentices won't need to be sent to the lower 48 to accomplish their apprenticeship.

A small subgroup made up of Kevin Hull, Debie Chivers and Larry Sutton was formed to begin work on apprenticeship issues. Obviously this group will depend on BLM California for a great deal of advice and expertise. Action items are:

1. Begin 2-year planning process for Great Basin Academy
2. Establish Joint Apprenticeship Committee for BLM
3. Incorporate Alaska in the program

Another topic of discussion was Technical Fire Management (TFM). The group feels that, given the level of expenditure on this program by BLM, we need to ensure that we are getting the most for our money. Two areas identified as needing more work were students' final projects and the number of failing students. It was felt that there are many areas that need study and investigation that could be accomplished under the auspices of the TFM program final projects. For example,

designing custom fuel models for certain types of range fuels or examining whether fewer, larger engines and water tenders are more efficient for initial attack than more, smaller engines and water tenders.

A small subgroup made up of Bob Lee and Rick Belger (a TFM graduate) was formed to work on TFM issues. Action items are:

1. Identify a pool of final projects that meet the Bureau's (National, State and Field Office) needs
2. Continually examine the TFM curriculum to ensure it is meeting BLM's needs
3. Identify potential curricula or programs that are "Beyond TFM"

A common thread throughout the conference call was the need to develop and articulate career paths for BLM fire personnel. It is felt that currently there are a number of "gaps" in how we prepare our people to progress in their careers. The Apprenticeship Program meets many "entry-level" needs, but then there is a gap before people reach the level where they're ready for TFM. After TFM, there are more gaps. Most formal fire curricula are technical courses aimed at preparing people for incident management positions, but there is a real need to prepare, refresh and re-train our people for their everyday jobs. This is an area that the Human Resource Development Committee will continue to pursue. Ron Dunton indicated that some efforts are now underway to fill the "Beyond TFM" gap, possibly by instituting some sort of leadership development program that addresses management and leadership issues for the various levels of our workforce in meaningful ways.

The group agreed to hold another conference call on May 7. On that conference call, there will be reports from all the committee subgroups: BLM Quals, Apprenticeship Program and TFM, plus any new agenda items that develop.

BLM employees wishing to have input to this group should forward issues through their appropriate channels. Issues should contain a problem statement (i.e., what is the problem), suggested alternatives and a recommended solution. Issues can be forwarded from State FMOs to either of the co-chairs: Pat Kidder in California or Larry Sutton at NIFC.

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WO-540